



**Wellbeing** Waterloo Region

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Challenging Systemic Barriers

**The Equity Lens**

**DISCUSSION GUIDE**

## Challenging Systemic Barriers: The Equity Lens

### Discussion Guide

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#### Introduction

Despite good intentions and significant investments, there continues to be evidence of imbalanced and unjust outcomes for people who are marginalized. Many organizations and services have made commitments to address these problems, but have not seen significant changes in their communities.

Wellbeing Waterloo Region is a community-led initiative that has committed to working differently across sectors to make transformative change in Waterloo Region. This interactive video series and Discussion Guide will support Wellbeing Waterloo Region's work to realize a deeper understanding of social inequities, and provide some common language we can use to work toward equity for the communities we belong to and serve.

While working through this material, it is important to ensure that your group has created a safe enough space to have meaningful discussion. Safe "enough" means that everyone is able to contribute without barriers to participation, while recognizing that feelings of safety are relative to each individual.

These conversations can be challenging, and even uncomfortable at times. We believe that it is only by working through our discomfort together that significant ideas, dialogue, and actions can emerge to create real and lasting change in our community.

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#### How to Use the Material

"Challenging Systemic Barriers: The Equity Lens" is a video series divided into three parts. Participants may choose to view all three parts together or separately. The videos should be viewed in order, as each part builds on the last. This material may be used in team meetings, a community of practice, staff forums, and more.

Each video has three prompts for discussion listed below in the Discussion Guide. These prompts are meant to serve as jumping off points only. We encourage groups working through this material to develop their own prompts for discussion, and to let their conversations evolve in ways that are meaningful to them.

#### Tips for Facilitators

- **Review:** Watch all three videos and read the Discussion Guide in full before presenting the material to your group.
- **Ask:** Don't be afraid to ask questions. Contact Wellbeing Waterloo Region backbone staff with questions or concerns - [wellbeingwr@regionofwaterloo.ca](mailto:wellbeingwr@regionofwaterloo.ca).
- **Contextualize:** Situate the material in the context of your own organization/community. Highlight and refer back to your organization's plans and policies around equity.
- **Engage:** Encourage your group's participation. Refer to the Mental Health Commission of Canada's guidelines for creating "safer spaces" ([link](#)).

## Prompts for Discussion

### Video 1: Preparing for the Work

1. How can we create safe “enough” spaces to both give and receive feedback about equity practice, and to support ongoing personal and professional development in this area?
2. When is it okay to make mistakes in our equity practice? Should we ever draw a line in terms of which mistakes are allowed and which are not? Under what circumstances?
3. What does oppression look like in our communities, and who gets to decide? In what ways do you think community wellbeing and equity are related?

### Video 2: Powerful Unexamined Ideas

4. What are the differences between equity and equality? Can you think of examples of when these two concepts get confused – what are the outcomes when this happens?
5. Can you think of a system in your own community where certain groups are over- or under-represented compared to the overall population? Why do you think this is the case, and what are the effects?
6. Think of a group you belong to. What is a powerful unexamined idea attached to this group? How has it affected you, positively or negatively?

### Video 3: The Legacies

7. The Legacies are big, complex, and challenging. How would you describe and talk about the Legacies with an 8-year-old? Reflect on your communication strategy here – when and why might this be useful in various contexts?
8. In what ways might an individual be privileged by some Legacies but not others? What effect might this have on the ways folks perceive or engage in equity practice?
9. Reflect on what you’ve learned using your “head” (learnings), “heart” (feelings), and “feet” (actions). How can these reflections be applied at the individual, community, and systemic levels?

### Final Reflections

10. Is there anything we’ve discussed today that made you feel uncomfortable? Do you think others felt the same discomfort? Why do you think that is, and what have you learned from it?
11. How might you apply what you’ve learned to your thinking about the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples of Canada? What can you do to help move the needle towards reconciliation, and what more do you need to know?
12. Do you have any unanswered questions still remaining? Which areas would you like to explore further?

## Glossary

This glossary provides definitions for key terms used in the “Challenging Systemic Barriers” video. It is designed to help us develop a common language we can use to work together toward equitable actions in our public and private lives. Please note that the terms below are described through the lens of Wellbeing Waterloo Region’s equity work – other definitions may apply in other contexts.

**Amygdala:** a part of the brain that focuses on feelings. It acts faster than the “thinking” part of the brain.

**Amygdala Hijack:** when your emotions overpower your thinking. It is sparked by feelings of fear and risk, which can cause powerful emotional responses in unexpected situations.

**Disaggregated Data:** data that has been broken down and analyzed by different categories (for example: by race, gender, level of education, etc.). This can reveal information about the data that was not obvious at first.

**Disparity:** the gap between two or more things that are not equal. For example, there is a *disparity* or gap between how much money men and women make on average for the same job.

**Disproportionality:** when the number of people represented from a specific group does not match their numbers within the overall population.

**Equality:** treating every person or situation the same. *Equality* does not necessarily lead to *equity*.

**Equity:** treating people or situations in ways that eliminate *disproportionality* and *disparity*. In other words, equity is achieved when imbalances and gaps between different groups are removed, so that outcomes for everyone can be the same.

**Ideology:** big ideas that inform the rules, customs, and norms of a group.

**Legacies:** seven events rooted in history that continue to negatively impact equity today.

- *Capitalism* – an economic system of private and for-profit ownership. It has led to unequal distribution of power and wealth globally.
- *Colonialism* – when a powerful country rules over a less-powerful country and uses its resources to gain more power and money.
- *Imperialism* – policies that increase a country’s influence through physical, political, or economic control over another.
- *Patriarchy* – a system that values masculinity over femininity. Patriarchy disadvantages women and all people who do not conform to traditional gender roles.
- *Religious Universalism* – the idea that there is one set of religious beliefs that everyone should follow.
- *Slavery* – when one person owns another. A slave does not have the same human rights as a free person.

- *Theft and Conquest of the Americas* – when Europeans took American lands from the Indigenous peoples through force and unfair contracts.

**Meritocracy:** the idea that people gain power based only on their skills and work ethic. *Meritocracy* does not take into account how a person's privilege or social status impacts their opportunities.

**Neoliberalism:** a type of capitalism based on free market trade, entrepreneurship, and elimination of government control.

**Oppression:** being exposed to unjust treatment or control by a more powerful person or institution.

**Powerful Unexamined Ideas:** thoughts about groups of people that are not based in evidence and hold a great deal of power within our society. These ideas come from the *Legacies*.

**Racism:** when someone hurts, judges, or uses their power over another based on skin colour.

**Unconscious Bias:** when we form ideas about certain groups of people without being aware we are doing it.

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## About Wellbeing Waterloo Region

Wellbeing Waterloo Region (WWR) is a community-led collaborative initiative where members work together across sectors to improve the wellbeing of residents in Waterloo Region. Members of WWR's working groups come from all parts of Waterloo Region, representing local residents with various lived experiences and over 70 organizations, including local Indigenous organizations, disability services agencies, health/mental health organizations, cultural and faith-based groups, LGBTQ2S+ collaboratives, municipal governments, the education sector, police and justice services, and more.

WWR strives to build impact in three big idea areas – Affordable Housing, Healthy Children & Youth, and Social Inclusion – and assesses its impact by measuring, monitoring and reporting regularly on its wellbeing indicators and actions. WWR members strive to work differently together to create a community where everyone thrives and no one is left behind.

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## About Kike Ojo-Thompson

Kike Ojo-Thompson is Principal Consultant at Kojo Institute – a leading consultancy that partners with organizations to unlock their potential by navigating the challenges connected to equity, bias, diversity, inclusion, anti-oppression and anti-racism.

Visit [kojoinstitute.com](http://kojoinstitute.com) for more information about what you've learned today and further training/consultation opportunities.

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## Take the 30 Day Challenge

Keep your practice going! The 30 Day Challenge is a daily practice of short, fun, and thought-provoking activities to help us mobilize in the struggle to challenge systemic barriers to equity – at home, on the job, and in our wellbeing work.

Every day for an entire month, participants are invited to open a new challenge on the 30-day calendar. The challenges are designed to boost knowledge and capacity around equity issues such as unconscious bias, social inclusion, and various forms of privilege.

Each challenge should take under 10 minutes, and features a learn, reflect, and practice component.

Visit [www.wellbeingwaterloo.ca/blog/30-day-challenge/](http://www.wellbeingwaterloo.ca/blog/30-day-challenge/) to get started.

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